

Not good enough

Von Gepo

Epilog: Epilogue

The next time he saw Akashi was at the InterHigh tournament in their second year. Atsushi had actually trained with more and more motivation. He hated losing, he gained weight and he really wanted to know Tatsuya's secret gift for winning one great tournament. With those motivations he became a force to be reckoned with. On a bit more selfish note, Tatsuya really enjoyed those muscles his mate was gaining. Akashi – the nice version – was smiling at them and complimenting Atsushi for the way he had developed. As one of Atsushi's main concerns, he simply asked back: "So I can play this time? You won't stop me?"

"No, I'll face you personally if you reach the finals. Your boyfriend has taken good care of you, I can see." Akashi nodded to him before looking back to Atsushi.

Tatsuya had decided not to get annoyed at being treated like Atsushi's side-kick. His boyfriend was stronger and had the personality of a mule sometimes while Tatsuya was a lot more harmonious. To Akashi he was someone useful but not someone worthy. In Akashi's eyes that only included people on his level and Tatsuya had no problem to acknowledge that he was no basketball genius in a way the miracles were. He did not have that drive anymore. He was happy at Atsushi's side. He had reached his limits and that was alright for high-school basketball. He would never be allowed to go pro anyway.

"We'll play." Atsushi pointed in the direction of Aomine and Kise. "Are they still injured?"

"Daiki is better but I fear Ryouta won't play many more tournaments. I advised him to take it easy but he decided to spend his high-school time playing against Daiki and working as a model afterwards."

"He'll give up basketball?" He looked shocked.

"As soon as his foot gives out, yes." There seemed to be a sliver of pain in Akashi's red eyes. "I'm glad good people are looking out for you."

"Tatsuya looks after me. Satsuki looks after Mine-chi. There's no one for Kise-chi."

"Sadly, yes. I had hoped his captain would have a bit more bite." This time his voice was colored with anger. "I hate to see my work go to waste."

"You smell unhappy." Atsushi looked at his former captain. "Even worse than before."

"I haven't been well these last few weeks. It was summer vacation after all." Akashi gave a small smile that looked not even remotely sincere. "Thank you for caring." He nodded to Tatsuya. "I'll see you in the finals. Let's have a good match then."

Tatsuya let out his held breath when Akashi had turned and taken a few steps. He had expected for his boyfriend to be ripped apart for mentioning Akashi's tense state. That had been rather civil all in all. When they were out of earshot, he asked: "Why is

summer vacation a bad time for Akashi?"

"He has to go home." Atsushi began to bounce a ball from one hand to another. He had learned some tricks over time. "He hates home."

"Do you know why?" Tatsuya had always thought that Akashi was this strange because ... well, he had never really thought about it. It made sense that his home life was shitty. Why else would he have multiple personalities?

"His father is a bad man." The other stared at the ball in his hands in concentration. "I think he said it's lonely." Atsushi looked like he tried really hard to remember something. "When no one really cares for you, it's lonely inside. When someone cares too much, it's also lonely."

"Did he say that?" What did it mean? How could it be lonely when someone cared too much for you? That made no sense. What counted as caring too much? What did that look like?

"I think so. I didn't really understand but I told myself again and again to remember." Atsushi looked at him. "What does it mean?"

"I don't know. I don't understand that as well." Tatsuya reached up and kissed his boyfriend. "I don't think I ever saw someone that cared too much." He could only imagine Akashi as being spoiled rotten and still complaining about that.

Actually, no, he could not. Akashi did not complain. He commanded where he could, he advised where he could not. He was sad when people did not follow that advise but he did not throw a tantrum. He did not act spoiled at all. He acted like he knew everything and not following his word was an act of stupidity but it may result from him being right most of the time. It was hard to say what exactly was wrong with him except for having that strange second personality that seemed a lot more genuine than this one. The power-hungry, violent asshole was a lot more believable than the caring, nice guy.

A caring, nice guy on the verge of snapping. Someone holding onto sanity with the last shreds of his power. Somehow it wasn't hard to believe that this was the reigning basketball champion. It was easy to believe he had anger to burn through. What was a bit harder was how everyone followed him – was he intimidating? Was he caring? Was he a genius? All of it. But was he reliable?

Atsushi relaxed around him which was a good sign. By being deeply connected with his instincts Atsushi was a great judge of character. He had a great perception of danger by being sensitive to other's emotions and scents. So why did he have such a different read of Akashi than Tatsuya?

"Aren't you ever scared of him?" he asked his boyfriend.

Atsushi looked at him for a moment and answered: "I am stronger. But he'll hurt you if I offend him. That's scary."

"You're scared for me?" Tatsuya leaned against him.

"You need to be protected. You're my princess."

He had to smile involuntarily. Most likely he should be offended. But he had read Western stories to Atsushi where heroes saved princesses from dragons and his boyfriend had declared him to be his princess then. It was kind of cute.

"You know, I once thought I might have to protect you from him." Tatsuya wasn't surprised this led to confusion. "You're a lot stronger than I once thought."

Atsushi simply blinked and looked at him. He did not seem to be able to grasp what he meant.

"I love you." Tatsuya kissed him again.

"That's good." His mate smiled at him.

Sometimes that ability not to think too deeply and draw too many connections was a gift rather than a disability. It might not fit in this society but it fit into something where having your heart in the right place mattered more.
It fit him.